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**COPY**

November 18, 2008

Mayor Ardell Brede  
City of Rochester  
City Hall  
201 4<sup>th</sup> ST SE  
Rochester, MN 55904

Commissioner Ken Brown  
Olmsted County Board of Commissioners  
2331 Halling Ct. NW  
Rochester, MN 55901

Dr. Wyatt Decker  
Mayo Clinic  
200 SW First ST  
Rochester, MN 55905

Mr. John Eckerman  
Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
220 South Broadway  
Rochester, MN 55904

Dear Gentlemen:

I received your letter from late September announcing the creation of the Southeastern Minnesota Rail Alliance with great interest.

Rochester is an important Minnesota community with unique and vital economic interests. As you may remember, in 2006, I was an early and public opponent of the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad's federal loan application, which would have financed the routing of coal trains through your community. After being approached for assistance by Rochester's business and local government leaders, I immediately took action in Congress to block this damaging proposal.

Looking forward, connecting the Twin Cities, via Southeastern Minnesota, to Chicago with high speed rail continues to be a priority for me in Congress. After more than a decade of planning, the vision of Midwest High Speed Rail is close to becoming reality. With a new administration entering the White House, growing concern about global climate change and volatile fuel prices, the time is right to mobilize support for a significant federal commitment to this effort.

I strongly support the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative as established by the 1998 feasibility study and recognized by the Federal Railroad Administration. This feasibility study was the result of collaboration among nine Midwestern states and Amtrak. As you well know, the study includes a 400-mile corridor connecting Chicago to St. Paul, with the Minnesota portion of the study defined as a 150-mile corridor between La Crescent and St. Paul's Union Depot multimodal transit hub. The Minnesota Department of Transportation's website includes a map detailing the network.

Next year's reauthorization of the federal transportation bill provides an opportunity to affirm the federal government's commitment to high speed rail and make the initial investment necessary to finalize planning and begin construction. If Congress succeeds in including Midwest High Speed Rail in the 2009 transportation reauthorization, additional federal funding will be required to complete construction of the network and ensure robust operating and maintenance budgets. As Minnesota's representative on the House Appropriations Committee, I will work diligently to ensure that these funds are secured and disbursed in the years to come.

The connection to the Midwest High Speed Rail network is vital for Minnesota's future economic competitiveness. I firmly believe that attempts to change the federally designated route will harm the project by causing unnecessary delays and unacceptable costs. I will forcefully oppose any measure that would have the effect of delaying or diverting the establishment of the agreed upon connection. Project delays could result in the forfeit of billions of federal dollars and jeopardize Minnesota's connection to Chicago. Such a scenario would severely harm the collective interests of Minnesotans and place our state at a competitive disadvantage.

I encourage the Southeastern Minnesota Rail Alliance to explore opportunities, in partnership with the Minnesota congressional delegation, to connect Rochester to the designated high-speed rail alignment in order to complement the prospects for this vital rail corridor. Such a connection would serve the citizens of Rochester while avoiding costly delays that could imperil the project. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss this option with you.

Securing federal funding for rail transit projects in Minnesota is a priority for me. Connecting St. Paul to Chicago is among the most important projects I will be working on in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. As we move forward, I hope we can work together to ensure Rochester's needs can be met without disruptions to the current plan.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress

cc: U.S Rep. James Oberstar  
U.S. Rep. Tim Walz  
U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar  
U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman  
State Sen. Steve Murphy  
State Sen. Katie Sieben  
Mayor Chris Coleman, City of Saint Paul  
Commissioner Jim McDonough, Ramsey County  
Commissioner Myra Peterson, Washington County